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AUTHOR Savitz, Fred R.; DiSibio, Robert A.
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ABSTRACT

The University College of Saint Joseph's University (Pennsylvania) has developed the Experiential Learning Assessment Program (ELAP) which is designed for University College students who wish to apply to and be assessed for college credits gained through experiential learning. The need for such a program was recognized when Archdiocesan teachers, who had received initial training at the University College, found themselves, according to state education department standards, deficient in coursework. On their return to the university, the parochial school teachers contended that their skills and experience made the completion of education courses redundant. To receive credit for prior (experiential) learning, students must be enrolled at a University College program. If the pre-assessment interview determines that the ELAP is an appropriate alternative, the student applies for assessment of prior learning competencies. A faculty member acts as assessor and works with the candidate to establish the ELAP Review and Agreement Contract. This documents the proposed methods for examining the competencies of the candidate in each subject area. Upon the completion of the contract and payment of assessment fees, the actual assessment procedure begins. Evaluation techniques may be written or oral examination, performance test, or product evaluation. The evaluation results are documented in an ELAP Credit Report Recommendation. Appended are samples of the forms used in the ELAP process and a schematic representation of ELAP. (FG)

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SAINT JOSEPH'S UNIVERSITY

Validating and Crediting Experiential Learning: The Saint Joseph's Way

A paper presented at the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education

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Dr. Fred R. Savitz
Assistant Professor of Education

Dr. Robert A. DiSibio
Assistant Professor of Education

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VALIDATING AND CREDITING
EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING:
THE SAINT JOSEPH'S WAY

An imposing challenge to higher education in the 1980's is the demand, and a legitimate demand it is, of adult learners who claim prior knowledge. Small liberal arts colleges and universities, unaccustomed to hearing the voices of a clientele beyond the late teenage years, are suddenly acknowledging the existence of a population of learners who speak for recognition of their previously acquired skills and competencies.

The University College of Saint Joseph's University has accepted the challenge of the decade. Recognizing that a sizable number of adults have established a range of competencies exceeding the means of evaluation that such devices as the College Level Examination Program or departmental challenge examinations can meet, the University College has developed its own Experiential Learning Assessment Program (ELAP). Prototype cases for ELAP have evolved from the historical roots of University College and its Department of Education as the source of academic and professional enrichment for educators in schools of the Philadelphia Catholic Archdiocese.

The evolution of an assessment program for parochial school educators delineates a logical sequence of events in the Department of Education. Its faculty members have long been involved in the kind of sponsored experiential learning that student teaching represents. Extending the responsibility for evaluating the competencies of teachers already in the field, therefore, became

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another part of the certifying process in which the Department was a participant.

Archdiocesan teachers, working primarily in the elementary grades, would commonly receive their initial training at University College. They would then enter the grammar school, prepared to teach according to archdiocese standards, but deficient in coursework according to state education department standards. Having attended workshops, participated in in-service programs, and studied independently, these teachers would return to Saint Joseph's University contending that their skills did, indeed, correspond to the state regulations, but arguing that the completion of actual courses in education would be redundant. Hence, the approval of ELAP transpired and the beginning of a new responsibility for faculty members of the Department of Education emerged: Evaluate the skills and knowledge of teachers acquired by prior experiential circumstances.

The rationale for ELAP is consistent with the rationale for assessing college level knowledge gained experientially in any discipline, as Keeton et al assert in Experiental Learning: Rationale, Characteristics, and Assessment (1976):

> ...Experiential learning provides and added dimension to the traditional pedagogical formats by placing learned knowledge and skills in a more practical or practice context...Most professions have implicit or explicit models of competence that consist of knowledge and skills. Experiential learning is seen as particularly effective in developing the skill dimensions of a competency model... The major outcome of experiential learning programs is often an exposure to...standards of practice in a newly chosen profession.[1]

E.L.A.P.------THE ST. JOSEPH'S WAY

Candidates who claim to have acquired college-level knowledge experientially may arrange to meet with the Assistant Dean for Special Programs in order to discuss the potential for receiving credit for prior learning. Furthermore, students who desire to be assessed for experiential learning must be currently enrolled University College students matriculated in a certificate or degree program.

The Assistant Dean of University College or a trained advisor will conduct a pre-assessment interview with the candidate. The purpose of the meeting will be to:

1. identify areas of expertise;
2. consider alternatives and options to the assessment program, for example, departmental challenge examinations, CLEP, or credit for non-collegiate courses of instruction;
3. determine academic disciplines that can be equated generally with the proposed, experientially acquired, college-level knowledge;
4. place the suggested non-traditional learning within appropriate slots of either the General Education Requirements, the major, or free electives.

If the initial interview concludes that an assessment of prior knowledge is the most appropriate means for earning credit, then the candidate may proceed to complete the assessment application (Exhibit I). The two-part application elicits both general information about the learning experiences of the candidate and specific information about the relationship of prior knowledge to collegiate courses. Additional documentation, such as the following, will assist in providing evidence for the claim of college-level knowledge:

1. a relevant list of books and articles read;
2. a job description which details the duties and responsibilities of the candidate;
3. a description of seminars and workshops attended.

An application for assessment must reflect prior learning that a single department would typically cover in its course offerings. Prior learning that translates into a number of academic departments would necessitate multiple applications, one for each department. A completed application would be submitted to the Office of the Assistant Dean with an application fee of $50.00.

Upon acceptance of the experiential learning assessment application, the Assistant Dean will locate a faculty member from the appropriate academic department of Saint Joseph's University to conduct the actual assessment of prior knowledge. The faculty member, acting as an assessment consultant, will be presented with the application and a second document, the ELAP Review and Agreement Contract (Exhibit II).

Completion of the Review and Agreement document will require curriculum analysis and interpretation of the assessment consultant. The assessor will define the area and scope of knowledge to be assessed; therefore, a listing of subjects to be evaluated will emerge. As the process ensues, the assessor should consider the following possibilities:

1. *subjects listed by the assessor may not perfectly equate with subjects listed by the candidate for assessment;*
2. *the candidate may have omitted extant college courses that approach experiential learning more accurately than subjects listed in the application;*
3. *experiential learning may dissect each of two traditional courses.*

Consequently, the candidate and the assessor will establish a congruence between the competencies claimed and the subjects listed. This congruence will be reflected by the listing of subjects prepared mutually by candidate and assessor and identified on the ELAP Review and Agreement Contract. Furthermore, the faculty evaluator will augment the document with proposed methods for examining the competencies of the candidate in each subject. Basically, the evaluative techniques are likely to resemble one of the following four, and may be used singularly or in combination:

1. *written examination, similar to the type of mid-semester or final examination required of a traditional course;*

2. *performance test*, in which the candidate demonstrates the proposed competency directly, as in the conducting of a scientific experiment;
3. *product evaluation*,, such as the examination of a previously completed work of fine art;
4. *interview*, in which the depth and breadth of knowledge are evaluated through a direct conversation.

After completing the details of the contract, the assessor will return a signed copy of it to the Assistant Dean, who then notifies the candidate that the document is ready for approval. If the candidate approves, then his or her signature is applied and the assessment may continue. If the candidate expresses reservations about the contract, than a meeting to reach agreement will be arranged among the candidate, the assessor, and the Assistant Dean. Failure to reach agreement will terminate the assessment, without any additional financial expense to the candidate.

Signature of the contract by assessor, candidate, and Assistant Dean constitutes an agreement to pursue the assessment of claimed competencies. The candidate is required to submit an assessment fee of $75.00 for each three-credit subject listed in the completed Review and Agreement Contract. The faculty evaluator will be requested to approve a memorandum that stipulates an hourly commitment of $15.00 from Saint Joseph's University, which includes the time previously consumed during the review and agreement stage (Exhibit III).

Upon completion of the Review and Agreement Contract and payment of assessment fees, the actual assessment of experiential learning may be undertaken. The candidate will be advised to contact the assessment consultant in order to arrange a time, or a series of meeting if the assessment is an extensive one, in order for the assessor to conduct the evaluation of prior learning claimed by the candidate. Results of the completed assessment will be documented by the assessment consultant on the ELAP Credit Report Recommendation form (Exhibit IV), which specifies the subjects evaluated and credits earned through the assessment.

After signing the recommendation form, (Exhibit V) the assessor will submit the document to the Assistant Dean, who subsequently will notify the candidate of the outcome of the assessment. Notification will apprise the candidate of the subjects and credits for which an evaluation was successfully conducted. The candidate will be made aware that, in cases of disparities between the Review and Agreement Contract and the Credit Report Recommendation, assessment fees were paid for credits attempted, not for credits earned. Hence, unsuccessful portions of the assessment may eventuate in the appearance of fewer credits on the recommendation than on the contract. Finally, the credits earned through ELAP will be articulated and transcripted by the Office of the Registrar of Saint Joseph's University according to articulation guidelines provided in an earlier paragraph (Exhibit VI-schematic representation).

The prototypal assessment depicted herein is characterized according to the perspectives of its two leading players: the faculty assessor and the University College candidate.

ASSESSORS VIEWPOINT

Having often queried why college students registered for courses in which they had sufficient first-hand experiences coupled with vicarious knowledge to supplant such an experience and somewhat surprised that the idea of credit for knowledge gained through experience was a relatively new venture in higher education, upon being hired at St. Joseph's University the authors pursued the idea and found that ELAP had just been formulated!

Conferences with the education department chairperson and the Assistant Dean of University College led to my becoming responsible for the assessment of education course(s) that reflected my educational expertise. As time passed, several students were encouraged to partake of ELAP's opportunities, and after my first year at St. Joseph's the first ELAP evaluation in education materialized.

The responsibility in approaching an ELAP evaluation had to be methodical. The procedure would vary of course, dependent upon each ELAP candidate, but nevertheless would incorporate an evaluation of the student's portfolio of experiences and achievements supplemented by a prior student interview; visitations to the respective student's classroom to observe the teacher in action; written responses to education questions; and the engagement of an exit interview eliciting feelings about the candidate's strengths and areas of concern, if any.

Following the procedural approach, exhausting as it was, a period of reflection ensued. Satisfied that sufficient time was spent, that a professional obligation was fulfilled, and that the reward(s) of experience for both the student and the assessor realized, the assessor contemplated the real distinction between formal instruction and instruction distilled in some fashion from raw experience.

> Plato's book, Meno reminds one of the uneducated slave boy guided by Socrates to re-discover the Pythagorean theorem. Where did the slave get the knowledge that could lead him to this complicated conclusion? Socrates said that the slave had been born with it in his soul, but the text shows that even an illiterate could have acquired the basic knowledge from his observation of life.

This anecdote illustrates a fundamental question of human learning--can anything worth knowing be taught or must the individual discover it for himself?[2]

STUDENT'S VIEWPOINT

Donald Wolfe describes the purpose of professional education in terms of development of the competencies required of the successful practitioner--not only knowledge, tools and generalized skills but also values and personal style, strengths, and propensities.[3] If there is any continuing purpose in higher education as it has evolved over the centuries, it is to facilitate this Development of People.

This citation aptly reflects the preconditions for a program such as ELAP and the necessity to pursue an assessment of one's knowledge and experiences.

Seeking out ways to justify credit for experience was a most challenging yet soul-searching opportunity. My initial thoughts turned to my experiential learning, but precisely what had been accomplished that related to my teaching and exactly how ELAP would allow me to earn college credit? A personal, contractual approach appeared to be a favorable procedure. To include varied items might well build a strong case for credit.

My portfolio would include a statement of my philosophy as it relates to the specific discipline(s); letters of recommendation from previous and present individuals who have seen me perform in the classroom; listings of educational functions and responsibilities; my own perceptions of current trends in the specific disciplines;

outside involvement via community and church services and of course, samples of teacher and student-made games and activities. I was amazed to discover that years of teaching alone do not make one proficient in achieving instructional and/or content competency.

Approximately four months elapsed before my completed portfolio was ready to be handed to the faculty assessor. Who said ELAP was easy!

Portfolio in hand, I proceeded to discuss its contents with the assessor. After about a month the assessor visited my classroom and spent a great deal of time talking with my youngsters, my peers, and administrator(s). Finally, he observed me teaching the areas which I felt wholly competent. My ELAP evaluation was complete, or so I thought! More was to come however.

A scheduled exit interview included questions on my teaching strategies coupled with research in the specific discipline. We shared feelings and my worthiness for credit. Subsequent notification informed me that I had fulfilled a satisfactory demonstration of the competencies for the particular disciplines.

Without reservation, the assessor's guidance was outstanding, and I felt that I fully validated my claim for college credit! I took advantage of the program and found that it worked for me. The experience provided me with an opportunity to display my competencies in a professional manner through a most viable medium--the assessment of experiential learning.

EPILOGUE

If there is any continuing purpose in higher education as it has evolved, it might well be to NURTURE AND FACILITATE THE DEVELOPMENT OF PEOPLE.--At St. Joseph's ELAP may well fulfill this goal!

EXHIBITS

Exhibit I

EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING ASSESSMENT PROGRAM (ELAP)

APPLICATION

This application is to be accompanied by a $50.00 application fee, which covers the cost of preliminary examination of your application and interview by the Office of the Assistant Dean for Special Programs. Upon agreement to proceed, credits earned through assessment will be charged at the rate of $75.00 per three-credit subject. All fees specified are non-refundable.

Name: _____ Home Telephone: _____

Address: _____ Business Telephon-: _____

_____ Fee Summary:

Application fee: $50.00

Social Security #: _____ Tuition fee: $75.00 per three-credit subject

Exhibit II

EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING ASSESSMENT PROGRAM (ELAP)

REVIEW AND AGREEMENT CONTRACT

Name of Candidate: _____ Social Security #: _____

Academic Department: _____

Subjects	Examination Method (s)	Credits Proposed

The non-refundable fee to the candidate, covering the above assessment of experiential learning, is $_____, exclusive of the original application fee. A check for this amount should be made payable to Saint Joseph's University.

AGREED TO:

Faculty Evaluator: _____ Date: _____

Assistant Dean: _____ Date: _____

Candidate: _____ Date: _____

Exhibit III

TO: Saint Joseph's University Faculty Assessor

FROM: Assistant Dean for Special Programs

SUBJ: ELAP Consultant Fee

As you proceed with the assessment of the student, kindly complete the ELAP consultant fee document and return it to the Office of the Assistant Dean for Special Programs.

Please note that you will be renumerated at the rate of $30 for every three-credit subject delineated by the Review and Agreement contract. CAEL (Council for the Advancement of Experiential Learning) findings suggest that one hour is the average amount of consulting time spent for every three semester hours assessed; College Council has recommended that renumeration occur at the rate of $15 per hour. Thus, you will observe that our fee of $30 for each three-credit subject exceeds the suggested rate, but our hope is to insure a maximum of control of quality by compensating for your time at twice the recommended fee during this initial year of operation.

Since ELAP is presently in an experimental phase, we shall regularly evaluate the growth of the program. To this end, your contribution by monitoring the time that you spend in conducting the assessment would be greatly appreciated. You may, if you wish, use the Time Report Form provided below.

Thank you in advance for your willingness to participate in this exciting and innovative program.

ELAP CONSULTANT FEE AGREEMENT

Name of Faculty Assessor _____

Social Security Number _____

Signature _____

Date _____

Name of Assessment Candidate _____

ELAP Time Report Form

Activity	Time Spent
Review and Agreement Contract	
Credit Report Recommendation	

Exhibit IV

EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING ASSESSMENT PROGRAM (ELAP)

CREDIT REPORT RECOMMENDATION

Name of Candidate: _____ Social Security #: _____

Academic Department: _____

Subjects Assessed	Examination Method (s)	Credits Recommended

For each subject assessed, I have indicated the method of evaluation and appended, where appropriate, supporting documents (such as written responses to test questions, tapes of interviews, or primary materials).

ASSESSMENT CONDUCTED:

Faculty Evaluator: _____ Date: _____

Assistant Dean: _____ Date: _____

Office of the Registrar: _____ Date: _____

Exhibit V

TO: Experiential Learning Assessment Program Candidate

FROM: Assistant Dean for Special Programs

DATE:

SUBJ: Assessment Results

Please be advised that your experiential learning assessment has resulted in the following outcome.

Subject	Credits Awarded

Credits earned through ELAP will be recorded on the official transcript of Saint Joseph's University.

REFERENCES

1,2 Morris T. Keeton and Associates. Experiential Learning: Rationale, Characteristics, and Assessment. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1976.

3 Eugene T. Byrne et al. Developing Experiential Learning Programs for Professional Education. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1980.